**Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government**

Response on Local Government and Human Rights

1. Through the statutory responsibilities of Local Government in Trinidad and Tobago, the Municipal Corporations ensure that certain human rights are protected within jurisdictional boundaries, with emphasis on public health and sanitation.

A significant part of the Municipal Corporations’ responsibilities relate to the right to sanitation and the right to health. This is evident through the responsibilities that fall under their jurisdiction such as:

* Maintenance of sanitary conveniences in streets and public spaces vested in the Corporation;
* Registration, inspection and licensing of food establishments and related business places (restaurants, bakeries, snack bars, food vendors, supermarkets);
* Food safety and certification of food handlers;
* Inspection of water bodies Re: Pest Control;
* Provision of and maintenance of parks and recreational grounds;
* Investigation of complaints / nuisance complaints Re: food, water, obnoxious odors, water, drainage and infrastructure works; mosquito and rodent infestation etc.;
* Regulation of the operations and conditions in marketplaces and abattoirs;
* Regulation of the operations of street vendors;
* Distribution of truck-borne water;
* Construction and maintenance of certain drains and water-courses;
* Disposal of garbage from private and public property;
* Maintenance and control of burial grounds and crematoria;
* Chemical treatment for insect and vector control;
* Reviewing and recommending for approval building plans, sub-division of lands through plans referred by Town and Country Planning Division;
* Emptying of septic tanks – liquid waste;
* Maintenance and control of childcare centres and homes for the elderly;
* Maintenance of schools across the country in collaboration with the Ministry of Education; and
* Dissemination of information for primary health care.

Of particular note is the right to safety and security and the protection of citizens through the operations of the Municipal Corporations and the establishment of Municipal Policy to maintain law and order.

Under the proposed new Local Government regime, the issue of public health and sanitation, inclusive of waste management, would be improved and so improve the quality of life of the population. In that regard, the Municipal Solid Waste Management System in Trinidad would be modernised as part of a strategy to reform the delivery of services. A Municipal Corporation must provide a healthy, clean, safe, serene and eco-friendly environment for its burgesses to live, work and recreate. Under this regime, the Corporation should be seen as the vehicle to encourage and support innovative, creative and environmentally-friendly approaches to solid waste management.

In addition to the responsibilities of the collection and disposal of garbage from public and private properties; provision of chemical treatment for insect, vector and rodent control as well as the fumigation of premises; removal of faecal waste from public and private properties among other activities, Municipalities undertake broadened public health responsibilities in the interest of public safety, such as:

* Clearing of vacant lots – there are a number of privately-owned lots which have become a public nuisance, and which endanger the safety of residents;
* Environmental control – provision must be made in the Act for the inclusion of Litter Prevention Wardens who will be responsible for policing the communities to ensure that persons comply with litter laws and that communities within their municipalities remain clean; and
* Regulation of garages and scrap yard owners who must apply to the respective Municipal Corporations based on the area in which they wish to operate for a license to operate.

1. Initiatives taken to include human rights mainstreaming in the provision of services include the effort by the local government bodies to disseminate information about their services as widely as possible. Hence, the use of the Government portal along with the Ministry’s own website and via social media, where persons may access and obtain necessary information and/or services for their perusal, are the ways in which information is disseminated to citizens at the regional level.

Technical support is also provided to burgesses requiring advice for the construction of walls, or fences or assistance in cutting fields, playgrounds or repairs to schools. Communities engage local government in obtaining non-financial help for the improvement of their communities which is testimony to local government’s commitment to the human right to development at the regional level.

1. The Trinidad and Tobago Government signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on September 27, 2007. This was ratified by the government on June 25th, 2015. The purpose of the Convention is to promote, protect and ensure the full enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedom by all persons with disabilities. The ratification has imposed several obligations on the State to adopt appropriate measures to enable persons with disabilities to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life. The Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government has been identified as an Implementing Agency under Article 9 of the Convention. As such, all agencies under its purview are required to take appropriate measures to ensure that infrastructural projects are designed so that persons with disabilities have access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment and other facilities and services open or provided to the public, both in urban and rural areas. Further, the Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards has developed a Manual entitled “Accessible and Usable Buildings and Facilities.” This manual specifies requirements for the design and construction of buildings, curb ramps, washroom facilities and sidewalks, among other infrastructural works, to ensure that these amenities, when constructed, are usable by persons with disabilities.
2. Major challenges faced by local governments in Trinidad and Tobago include a lack of resources necessary to facilitate the many and varied needs of Municipalities. Though councillors are keen on the provision of projects that address infrastructural and other issues, many municipal corporations are unable to meet their obligations to burgesses due to lack of funding. As such, priority is given to development efforts that would serve as many burgesses in the Municipalities as possible. Additionally, local governments are faced with difficulties in coordination between agencies, as many agencies handle similar projects. Hence, parties are faced with an overlapping of efforts or unequal distribution of resources, resulting in inefficiencies in the provision of services.